



Duncan Hunter  
U.S. House of Representatives  
50th District, California

February 6, 2017

The Honorable Jim Mattis  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Mattis:

Now that the U.S. Navy is scheduled to take possession of the U.S.S. Rafael Peralta, preparing for a journey this spring to its homeport in San Diego, California, I respectfully request that you—as Secretary of Defense—review his nomination for the Medal of Honor given your familiarity with the facts. As you are well aware, Sergeant Peralta was posthumously nominated for the Medal of Honor for smothering a grenade during combat in Fallujah, Iraq, in 2004, undoubtedly saving the lives of his fellow Marines.

Peralta's nomination was downgraded to the Navy Cross following a lengthy internal Pentagon review that was prompted following an anonymous complaint to the Inspector General. The confusion around the nomination was on the basis of whether Peralta consciously pulled the grenade into his body since he was first hit in the head by a fragment from a ricocheted bullet.

Multiple eyewitnesses conveyed that from their respective fields of view, Peralta initiated several movements toward the grenade and pulled it into his body. In the spirit and tradition of the Medal of Honor, these eyewitness accounts are exceedingly sufficient, but they were overridden based on questionable forensic evidence assembled by Pentagon bureaucrats. The justification to downgrade Peralta's award still stands in direct contradiction to all other evidence produced through the Marine Corp's own investigation, and independent pathology report and other definitive proof.

For instance, my staff recovered a video of Peralta after he was killed and removed from the house he and the other Marines had entered. The Pentagon has consistently maintained that the grenade detonated six to ten feet from his right leg, despite the fact that the grenade fuse was recovered from the center of Peralta's body armor and shrapnel markings on his rifle—which was directly underneath him when the grenade detonated—verify that he contained the blast with his body. Further, the video evidence clearly shows Peralta sustained severe injury to his upper body only.

According to the Pentagon's previous logic, the grenade fuse would have needed to travel under and through the concrete floor, as well as the fragments of shrapnel that damaged his weapon.

You and I are both well aware that this is impossible and such logic equates to nothing more than a convenient excuse not to award Peralta the Medal of Honor.

It is also important to note that any eyewitness accounts that might have since been altered or publicly questioned originated from Marines that were not in the room with Peralta or did not have a direct line of site once the grenade landed and the Marines took cover. Three of the Marines, to this day, credit Peralta with saving their lives. A fourth Marine who also credits Peralta with saving his life, later died in a motorcycle accident, but his statements and record of support are directly aligned with his fellow Marines.

It is my firm belief that Pentagon bureaucrats, whether intentionally or not, created needless confusion with Peralta's nomination. And different from your predecessors, who lacked your personal experience commanding Marines and forces in Iraq, I believe you have the right perspective and familiarity with the facts to make an informed judgment on this matter. Even more so, you have the courage to do what's right where others have been too sensitive to internal Pentagon politics.

Mr. Secretary, I have worked this case personally and I ask for your support to at least reopen Peralta's nomination separately from any ongoing valor award review underway. I am also available to provide you additional evidence that I can confirm was either overlooked or not weighed appropriately—including an independent pathology report.

Together, it is my hope that we can finally give Sergeant Peralta with the recognition he deserves.

Semper Fi.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Duncan Hunter', is written over the printed name and title. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Duncan Hunter  
Member of Congress